

“THE TIME IS SHORT”**NO. 2861****A SERMON****PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, DECEMBER 10, 1903****DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON****AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON***“The time is short.”**1 Corinthians 7:29*

THE text does not say that *time* is short. That would have been a true statement. Compared with eternity, time, at the very longest, is but as a pin's point. But note what the text does say, “*The time is short.*” It is the time of our life, the space of our opportunity, the little while we shall be upon the present stage of action, that is short. It is narrow and contracted, as the original implies. “Behold,” saith the psalmist, “thou hast made my days as a handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee.” Brief is the season we have allotted to us, brethren, in which we can serve the Lord our God.

This is a truth which everybody believes, knows, and confesses. It is trite as a proverb on every tongue, yet how few of us act as if we believed it! We are conscious of the precariousness of other people's lives, but somehow or other, we persuade ourselves that our own time is not quite as limited as theirs. We think we have “ample time and verge enough,” but we wonder that our neighbors can be so careless and prodigal of days and years, for we observe the wrinkles on their brows, we detect the grey hairs on their heads, and perceive the auguries of death in their mien, and we doubt not they will soon have to render in their account.

“All men think all men mortal but themselves,” is a “night thought” that may well startle us, as we rest from the business and the bustle, or the waste and wantonness of each succeeding day. Why hide you from yourselves the waning of your own life work, the weakening of your own strength, the weaving of your own shrouds? As a creature, you are frail, as an inhabitant of the world, you are exposed to casualties, as a man, there is an appointed time for you on earth. You must be swept away by the receding tide, you must go with the rest of your generation.

Ask an angel what he thinks of the life of a mortal, and he will tell you that he remembers when the first man was made, and since then the earth has been always changing its tenants. Peradventure he is baffled to recall the races that have come and gone in countless succession. For a little while they floated on the surface, then they sank beneath the stream. At first they struggled on through centuries, but after that, they failed, any one of them, to attain a tenth of that pristine age. “Short-lived!” says the angel, “they seem to me as leaves upon a tree, as insects on the earth, as flies in the air. Like the grass that flourishes in the meadows, scarcely have I gazed upon them ere they are cut down, withered and gone.”

Or if you never meet with an angel to interrogate him, talk familiarly with one of the trees of an ancient forest. Ask what it has seen, and though it cannot speak in tones articulate, you can lend it a tongue, and it will tell you that hundreds of years have passed, and history has accumulated, from the time when it was an acorn, till now it covers a wide space with its far-spreading foliage. Yes, the oak and elm can tell us that man is but an infant of today.

Would you rather take counsel of your fellow creatures? Then ask the old man what he thinks of life. He will tell you that when he was a boy, he thought he had a vast length of time before him. So heavily did the days hang on his hands that he played the hours away, and was glad when birthdays told of the years that were gone. It was his strong desire, and his panting ambition, to break loose from the moorings of childhood and launch out into the great wide sea of turmoil and enterprise, but now he looks back on these seventy years that have been gradually accumulating, as a dream.

Through all the fitful stages of life's journey, present time is always perplexing, it must be past before it is understood. It seems to him only as yesterday when he left his father's roof to be an apprentice. He remembers it distinctly, and fondly tells you of some quaint things that happened in those olden times. How short a while since the bells rang out his marriage peal, and now his children have reached their manhood, and his children's children climb upon his knee and call him “Grandfather.” Yet he remembers when, as it were but yesterday, he was himself a little child, and his grandsire clasped him to his bosom.

My venerable friends, you will bear witness that I do not exaggerate when I speak thus, my language is only the feeble expression of a forcible experience. You can realize more vividly than I can paint the sensation of looking back over the entire span of threescore years and ten, to the stripling, this appears a very long period, while to you it merely seems as a watch in the night.

And yet, perhaps, there are among you some hoary veterans, some elderly matrons, who need to be reminded that “the time is short.” Present health and activity may tempt you to forget that nature, in your case, stands upon the verge of her confines. What if your frame be strong, what if the bloom still lingers on your checks? You have nearly reached the goal, the allotted term that mortals cannot pass. I have seen fine days in autumn, when the air was soft as in balmy spring, but they gave no promise of another summer. I knew the season was too far advanced for winter to delay its approach much longer.

So, you, my aged friend, can be sure that the hour of your departure is drawing near. Should five, or even ten more years be granted to you, how quickly they must pass when seventy by-gone years have so rapidly fled! The remnant of your days will surely cover little space when the whole compass of your life has stretched over so small an area. Be parsimonious of minutes now, though you may have been at one time, prodigal of years. At the end of life you have no time to parley and postpone, to resolve and yet to trifle with resolutions, to waste and squander golden opportunities. “The time is short.”

But to estimate this truth aright, we may well turn from the cycles that angels have witnessed, the centuries that trees have flourished, and the seasons that have come and gone in the memory of our grandsires to consider “the years of the right hand of the Most High.” Inquire at the mouth of the Lord, take counsel of the eternal God.

Remember how it is written, “A thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night.” “One day is with the LORD as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” “He sits upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers,” ephemera, insects of an hour, compared with Him. Like the grass, we spring up, and like the grass we are mowed down.

Compared with the lifetime of the Eternal, what is our life? Nay, there is no comparison, it is almost too insignificant for contrast. “My days are like a shadow that declineth; and I am withered like grass. But thou, O LORD, shall endure for ever; and thy remembrance unto all generations.” I wish I had the power to impress this truth on every heart. As I have not, I shall try to point the moral it suggests, and pray that the Spirit of God may seal the instruction upon every heart.

“The time is short,” so first, *it warns*, next, *it suggests*, then, *it inspires*, and lastly, *it alarms*.

I. First, IT WARNS.

If you knew the sterling worth of time, you would shrink from the smallest waste of so precious a thing. Fools say that time is long, but only fools talk like that. They say that “time is made for slaves.” He alone is a free man who knows how to use his time properly, and he is a slave indeed who finds it slavery to pursue his calling with a good conscience, and serve his God with diligence, fidelity, and zeal.

Knowing that “the time is short,” you and I have not an hour to squander upon unprofitable amusements. There are some diversions which afford a respite from the incessant strain of labor and anxiety, and are profitable to strengthen the mind, and brace up the nerves. These are not only allowable, they are fit and proper, but while recreation is both needful and expedient to keep the mental and physical powers in working order, we can give no countenance to such dissipation as tends rather to enervate than to invigorate the constitution.

Popular taste displays its own perverseness in seeking to extract pleasure from folly and vice. Fashion lends its sanction to many a pastime that ill becomes any wise, rational, intelligent person, but the Christian, in his relaxations, must seek healthy impulse, and avoid baneful stimulant. “The time is short,” *We cannot afford to lose it in senseless talk, idle gossip, or domestic scandals.*

Nor can we afford to plan a round of empty frivolities to while away an afternoon or an evening, as the manner of some is. Our time is too precious to be frittered away in formal calls and punctilious visits. Well might Cotton Mather complain of the intrusion of a certain person who had called to see him, as people will call on ministers, as though their time was of no importance. “I would sooner have given that man a handful of money,” said he, “than that he should have thus wasted my time.”

You count it a little thing to trespass on our minutes, but in so doing you may spoil our hours. Whether you think so or not, it is often distracting to us to be troubled with trivial things in the midst of our sacred engagements. We may be called from an absorbing study, we may be rudely interrupted when our knees are bent, and our heart is being lifted up to God in intercession, we may have our minds drawn from the weightiest matters to listen to the most frivolous observations.

It is said of Henry Martyn that he never wasted an hour. I wish it could be said of us, that we wasted neither an hour of our own time, nor an hour of other people’s time.

Brethren, the time is too short to make a desire for a friendly communion an excuse for frothy conversation. It requires no stretch of imagination to picture to ourselves two men, who are both believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, “called to be saints,” and accounted faithful, meeting in a room and greeting each other as friends. They will surely have something choice to talk about. All heaven is full of God’s glory, and the earth is full of His riches. There is range enough for thought, for speech, for profitable converse.

Listen awhile. One observes that the weather is very cold. “Yes,” says the other, “the frost is still very sharp.” There they stick, they have nothing further to say till, presently, one of them remarks, “It will be rather slippery travelling tonight,” to which comes the reply, “I daresay many horses will fall down.” And are these the men of whom Peter testifies that they are redeemed, with the precious blood of Christ, from their vain conversation, received by tradition from their fathers? Are these the men who have been made partakers of the Holy Ghost? Is this frivolity becoming to the heirs of heaven? Yet thus, often, is precious time squandered, and the faculty of speech abused.

There is an ancient prophecy which I would love to see fulfilled in modern history. In “David’s Psalm of Praise,” (only one psalm, the 145th, is so entitled), he says, “All thy works shall praise thee, O LORD; and thy saints shall bless thee. They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power; to make known to the sons of men His mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of His kingdom.” By such converse as that, beloved, you might “redeem the time” in these evil days, but you are afraid of being charged with cant, or with pushing your religion a little too far.

Brethren, it is high time we had a little more of such cant, and that we did push religion a little farther than has been our wont, for golden opportunities are lost, and profitable interchange of holy thought is lamentably neglected.

In days of yore, “they that feared the LORD spake often one to another; and the LORD hearkened and heard it.” Not much of this now prevails among professing Christians. Little enough is said that is worth men’s hearing, much less worth God’s hearing, and if He did hear it, instead of putting it down in “a book of remembrance,” and saying, “They shall be mine,” surely, in His infinite mercy, He would forbear to record the vain thoughts and empty words which could only be a stigma upon their characters.

By the brevity of time, then, and by the rapidity of its flight, I admonish you to refrain from all abuses of the tongue. Do invest each hour in some profitable manner, that when past, it may not be lost. Let your lips be a fountain from which all streams that flow shall savor of grace and goodness.

The time, moreover, *is much too short for indecision and vacillation.* Your resolving and retracting, your planning and scheming, your sleeping and dreaming, your starting up from slumber only to sink down into a drowsier state than before, are a mockery of life, and a willful murder of time. Of how many

of you is it true that if you ever did entertain a noble purpose, you never found a convenient season to carry it out? On the verge of conversion, sometimes, you have halted till your convictions have grown cold. Ten or twenty years ago, you listened to the appeal, “My son, give me thine heart,” and you answered, “I will,” but to this day you have never fulfilled your word. “Go work in my vineyard,” said the Master. “I go, Lord,” was your prompt reply, yet you have never gone.

Today, as aforetime, you stand idling. Some of you, indeed, were in a more hopeful condition thirty or forty years ago than you are at present. What account can you give of yourselves? What has become of those intervening years? The infinite mercy of God has kept you out of hell, but there is no guarantee that His longsuffering will shield you from destruction another instant.

O sirs, “the time is short,” the business urgent, the crisis imminent! ’Tis madness to be halting between two opinions. If God be God, serve Him, and if not, take the alternative and serve Baal. Let your mind be made up, one way or the other, without another moment’s delay. How long halt ye between two opinions?

And you Christian people, with your grand illusive projects, how they melt away! Some of you would have done a great deal that is useful by now if you had not dreamed of doing so much that is imposing. Oh, what wonderful plans for evangelizing London, for converting the whole Continent of Europe to Christ, float in the brain, or evaporate in a speech, and nothing is done! We are like a certain Czar of Russia of olden times, who always wanted to take a second step before he took the first. We are always projecting some wonderful scheme that proves too wonderful to ever be carried out. So we dream of what ought to be and should be, of what might be, and as we hope may be.

Such “dreams are the children of an idle brain.” The dreamers grow listless and nothing is done. In the name of the eternal God, I beseech you, if you love Him, get to work for Him. Better slay a single enemy than dream of slaughtering an army. Better that you sow a single grain of corn, or plant a single blade of grass, than dream about fertilizing the Sahara, or reclaiming from the mighty sea untold acres of fertile land. Do something, sirs, do something. It is high time to awake out of sleep, for “the time is short.”

This thought may serve to warn us against another folly, that of *speculating upon nice points of controversial theology*. You know how the schoolmen used to debate and wrangle about how many angels could stand on the point of a needle, and with many other propositions, no less absurd, did they weary themselves. Strangely indeed was the ingenuity of men taxed to find subjects for discussion in the dark days of those dull doctors of learning.

There is something of that spirit abroad even now, ministers will devote whole sermons to the discussion of some crotchet or quibble that does not signify the turn of a hair to anybody in the universe. I have generally noticed that the less important the point is, the more savagely will some persons defend it, as if the world might go to rack and ruin, and all the sinners in it go blindfold to perdition, and the work of salvation must stand still to have this point discussed.

One brother who meets me occasionally, can never be five minutes in my company, but what he attacks me upon the question of free agency and predestination, I told him the last time I saw him, that I would have it out with him one of these days, but I must defer it till after the day of judgment, for I was too busy to talk about it just now. And I feel like that about a great many questions.

There are brethren who can fully explain the book of Revelation, though I generally find that they exclaim one against the other, till they declaim each other off the face of the earth. I would sooner be able to proclaim the cross of Christ, and explain the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, than to decipher the imagery of Ezekiel, or the symbols of the Apocalypse. Blessed is he who can expound the mysteries. I have no doubt about his blessedness, but I am perfectly satisfied with another blessedness, namely, if I can bring sinners to Jesus, and teach the saints some practical truths which may guide them in daily life.

It seems to me that the time is much too short to go up in a balloon with speculations, or to go down into the mines of profound thought, to bring up some odds and ends and scraps of singular knowledge.

We want to save souls, and to conduct them to that heaven where God’s presence makes eternal day. This seems to me to be the pressing demand upon us now that “the time is short,” and “the night comes when no man can work.”

Let this also admonish us, brethren, *to singleness of purpose*. We must have only one aim. Had we plenty of time, we might try two or three schemes at once, though even then we should most probably fail for want of concentrating our energies, but as we have very little time, we had better economize it by attending to one thing. The man who devotes all his thought and strength to the accomplishment of one reasonable objective is generally successful.

My soul, bend yourself down and lay yourself out for the glory of God, be this the one aim of your entire being. Form your friendships, and order your occupations, so as to fulfill this first and highest duty of life. Be it your one sole motive to live for His honor, and if necessary, even to die to promote His renown among the sons of men. “Present your bodies a living sacrifice.” Attune your souls to the great Hallelujah, “While I live will I bless the LORD; I will sing praises unto my God while I have my being. Let everything that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD.”

O my brethren, this sublime enthusiasm will work wonders! You dissipate your strength and fritter away your opportunities by dividing your attention. You say that you want to be a Christian, meanwhile, your heart is set upon getting riches, you seek to store your mind with the learning and wisdom of the world, you wish to gain repute as a good talker in company, and a convivial guest at the social board. Ambition prompts you to seek fame among your fellows.

Very well, I shall not denounce any one of these things, but I would use every persuasive to induce you who are believers in Christ to renounce the world. If Christ has bought you with His blood, and redeemed you from this present evil world, He has henceforth a claim on you as His servant, and it is at your peril that you take up with any pursuits that are inconsistent with a full surrender of yourself to Him. You belong to Him, so live wholly to Him.

The reason why the majority of Christians never attain to any eminence in the divine life, is because they let the floods of their life run away in a dozen little, trickling, rivulets, whereas, if they cooped them up into one channel, and sent that one stream rolling on to the glory of God, there would be such a force and power about their character, their thoughts, their efforts, and their actions, that they would really “live while they lived.”

II. “The time is short.” THIS SUGGESTS.

Do you know what reflection this fact suggested to me? “Surely, then,” I thought, “I have some opportunity to follow out the work of faith, the patience of hope, and the labor of love, though not the opportunity I once had.” Then, picturing to myself an ideal of a short life all used, nothing wasted, all consecrated, nothing profaned, I seemed to see a boy giving his young heart to Christ.

I saw the lad believing in Jesus while yet beneath his father’s roof, and under his mother’s care. No sooner saved than he began at once to serve God after a boy’s way, and still increasing in intelligence and energy as a stripling, and afterwards as a young man, from the first he devoted himself, with all the intensity of his being, to his Lord’s service.

So diligent and persevering was he that he lost no time. So jealously did he watch his own heart, and so far was he from falling into sin, that there were no dreary intervals spent in wandering and backsliding, and retracing his steps in repenting of the evil, in getting lukewarm, and then rekindling former ardor.

With my mind’s eye, I followed that young man living a holy life through a succession of years, getting up to the highest possible platform of spirituality, and keeping there, and all the while blessed with such abundance of the graces and gifts of the Spirit of God as should make him bring forth much fruit to the glory of the Father, do much for the honor of Jesus, prove a great blessing to the church, bear a rich testimony to the world, and diffuse saving benefits to the souls of men.

This was my ideal of a vessel “meet for the Master’s use.” I lingered lovingly upon it. The child became a man. His life was brief, it was soon over. Our days on earth are as a shadow, but happily they

may be radiant and leave a trail of light behind them. Might not even God Himself look down, with a measure of admiration, from His eternal dwelling place on the career I have sketched? The slender threads of fleeting moments are worked up to the goodly fabric of a complete biography. Endowed with one talent—TIME—and that endowment sparse, the gift so prized as to be economized, so looked after that it is never squandered, so usefully employed that its judicious expenditure can never be vainly regretted, so profitably invested that the faithful steward welcomes the advent of his Lord, ready and anxious to give in his account. This is as I would wish to be.

Some of you, who are unconverted, can never hope to receive the greeting that awaits such a faithful servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. You have lost your golden opportunity, you have wasted your substance in riotous living. But are there not children here to whom this is possible, and youths who might convert my daydream into a narrative?

Oh for men and women with the ambition, and one enterprise, to glorify the Lord! Ardent do I desire that God should be glorified in me, and that not in a small measure. I have prayed, and I do pray Him to make the most He can make of me—to do it anyhow. What if, to this end, I must be cast into the furnace of affliction, and suffer for His sake? What if my honor should be trampled in the dust, and my name become a hissing and a by-word, and a reproach among the sons of men, while the witness of my integrity is on high? Here am I, O Lord, to do anything, to bear aught, that You shall bid! Only get as much glory to Your own name as can be got out of such a poor creature as I am.

Who will join me in this petition? Vows made in our own strength are vain, but I solemnly charge each Christian young man to foster this aspiration. In the name of Him who has redeemed you with His blood, gird up the loins of your mind, and survey the course you have to run. Prepare for the good fight of faith in which you are to engage. Live to the utmost possible consecration of your entire manhood in its triple nature—spirit, soul, and body. Yield yourself up unreservedly to the Lord Jesus Christ. Do not stop to parley. “The time is short,” therefore, “whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest.”

III. “The time is short.” THIS INSPIRES US.

It ought to fire us with zeal for immediate action. The sun hastens on, the sands run down. “Now is the accepted time.” Let those who love the Lord be prompt. The time to do the deeds that you must do, or leave them undone, flies swiftly past. Say not, “I will do this by and by.” Do it at once. Other duties await you, brief is the space allotted you for all. Are your children converted? Pray with them tonight. Let not tomorrow come without putting your arms about their necks, and kneeling down with them devoutly, and praying fervently that God would save their souls. It is the King’s business, and it demands haste. “The time is short” for others as well as for yourself.

A dear brother told me, a week or two ago, that a man who worked for him frequently, brought in goods when they were finished, and he thought that the next time the man came in, he would speak to him about his soul. When he came, however, business absorbed the employer’s attention, and the man passed away. He felt, he did not know exactly why, pricked in his conscience, and resolved that on the next occasion, he would inquire as to his eternal interests, but he was too late. Instead of coming again, a messenger brought tidings that he was dead. Startled by the news, our brother could find no comfort in regrets, though he bewailed as one who could not forgive himself a hundred wasted opportunities in the presence of one keen self-reproach.

Oh, that an inspiration would constrain you to serve the Lord now! Every time the clock ticks, it seems to say “now.” The time is so short that the matter is urgent. Do not wait, young man, to preach Jesus till you have had more instruction, begin at once. You, who mean to do something for the poor of London when you have hoarded up more money, spend your money now, do it at once. You, who mean to leave a large sum to charities when you die, defer it not, be your own executors. Lay out the capital at once, get some joy and comfort out of it yourselves. Now is the time to carry a good purpose into good effect. Before you were saved, the message to you was, “Today, if you will hear his voice, harden not

your heart.” After you are saved, the message to you is, “Today, obey his voice, and serve the Lord your God with all your heart, and mind, and soul, and strength.” “The time is short,” so make the most of it.

“The time is short.” I want to ring this sentence louder and louder in your ears that it may *inspire you to pray for immediate conversions*. I have met with many who are hoping to get converted some day, but not now. Is not such procrastination perilous? Dare any of you run the risk of willfully abiding in unbelief another hour? Can you brook the thought of remaining month after month in jeopardy of your soul? Is it safe to tempt the Lord, and provoke the anger of the Most High?

O sirs, while you flatter yourselves with pleasing prospects, you are beguiling your hearts with a reckless presumption! We want you to be converted, and no time can be more suitable than this present time. Forsake your sin immediately. Do not turn back to dally with it a little longer. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and lay hold on the promise of eternal life, without any further delay. You may never see another morrow, or the desire that whets your appetite now may fail you then. This is our prayer, that you may, this very hour, be brought into the fold of Christ.

Then seeing that “the time is short,” *let us bear with patience the ills that vex us*. Are we very poor? “The time is short.” Does the bitter cold pierce through our scanty garments? “The time is short.” Is consumption beginning to prey on our trembling frame? “The time is short.” Are we unkindly treated by our kinsfolk? Do our comrades revile, and our neighbors mock us? “The time is short.” Have we to bear evil treatment from an ungenerous world? “The time is short.” Do cruel taunts try our tempers? “The time is short.”

We are travelling at express speed, and shall soon be beyond the reach of all the incidents and accidents that disturb and distract us. As we travel home to our Father’s house, the distance diminishes, and we begin to sight the city of the blessed, “the home over there.” It is needless to murmur or repine, why trouble yourselves about what you will do a month or two hence? You may not be here, you may be in heaven. Your eyes will have beheld “the King in his beauty,” you will have seen “the land that is very far off.”

*“The way may be rough, but it cannot be long;
So smooth it with hope, and cheer it with song.”*

Worldly mindedness ill becomes us who have confessed that we are “strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” “The time is short” in which we can hold any possessions in this terrestrial sphere. Then let us not love anything here below too fondly. We brought nothing into the world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. Survey your broad acres, but remember that you will not long be able to walk across them. Look on your plenteous crops, but ere long another shall reap the profit of those fields. Count your gold and silver, but know that wealth, greedily as it is sought, will not give you present immunity from sickness and sorrow, neither will it secure your welfare when called to quit your frail tenement.

Trust in the living God. Love the Lord, and let eternal things absorb your thoughts and engage your affections. “The time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away.”

Are these gloomy reflections? Nay, dear brethren, the fact that “the time is short” *should inspire us, who are of the household of faith, with the most joyous expectations*. Do you really believe in the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? Do you really believe that your head is to wear a crown of life that fades not away? Do you really believe that these feet of yours, all shod with silver sandals, will stand upon that street of pure gold? Do you really believe that these hands shall pluck celestial fruits from trees whose leaves can never wither, and that you shall lie down in the spice-beds in the gardens of the blessed? Do you believe that these eyes shall see the King in that day when He comes in His glory, and that these bones shall rise again from the grave, and your bodies shall be endowed with an incorruptible existence? “Yes,” say you, “we do believe it, and believe it intensely too.”

Well, then, I would that you realized it as so very near that you were expectant of its fulfillment. Who would cry and fret about the passing troubles of a day when he saw the heavens open, beheld the beckoning hand, and heard the voice that called him hence?

Oh, that the glory might come streaming into your soul till you forget the darkness of the way! Oh, that the breeze from these goodly mountains would fan you! Oh, that the spray from that mighty ocean would refresh you! Oh, that the music of those bells of heaven in yonder turrets would enliven you! Then would you speed your way towards the rest that remains for the people of God, inspired with sacred ardor and dauntless courage. But the ungodly are not so. It is to them I must address the last word, “The time is short.”

IV. THIS ALARMS US, and well it may, on their account.

Let me toll a knell. It is a dismal knell I have to toll for the unconverted man to whom life has been a joy, for he has prospered in the world. You have succeeded in the enterprise on which you set your heart. You have bought the estate that you longed to secure. It is a fine place certainly, but you have only got it for two or three years! Would I have taken it for that term? No, I would not have taken it on a nine hundred and ninety-nine years' lease. Freeholds for me!

Did I say two or three years? Nay, there is not a man beneath the sun, who can guarantee that you will hold it for three weeks. “The time is short.” Drive down the broad avenue, walk round the park, look into the old feudal mansion, but “the time is short,” very short, and your tenure very limited. You have gained your objective, you are possessed of real property, what next? Why, make your will. The thing is urgent. “The time is short.” But what have you not done?

You have not believed in Christ, you have not embraced the Gospel, you have not found salvation, you have not laid hold on eternal life, you have not a hope to solace you when your strength fails, and you pant for breath. How few the opportunities that remain!

Some of you have attended my ministry all the while I have been in London, I wonder how much longer you will hear me, and yet remain unsaved. Your turn to die will come at length. You ail a little, but your trifling indisposition does not yield to treatment, the symptoms grow serious, the disease is dangerous, your death is imminent. Pain unnerves you, terror distracts you. Your family and your friends look at you with helpless pity.

The doctor has just left you in dismay. Send for the priest, or fetch the parson, but what can they do for you unless you believe in Jesus? 'Tis over, the last struggle! Then picture yourself to yourself—a lost spirit, asking for a drop of water to cool your tongue! That will be your portion, sinner, unless you repent.

Think you, sirs, there is but a step between you and death, a short step between you and hell, unless you believe in Jesus. Do you still imagine that there is time enough and to spare? I beseech you, do not cherish so vain a thought. It may be that you suspect me of exaggerating, that I cannot do in such a case as this. Time is rushing on, swiftly but silently. While I speak, the minutes pass, the hour is soon gone, the day is almost spent. I charge you then, by the ever-blessed Spirit, listen now to the warning, escape from sin, get out of that broad road which leads to destruction, believe in Jesus, lay hold on eternal life.

May the Spirit of God arouse you! May these words be blessed to you! They would be put more forcibly if I knew how. With all the fervor of my soul, I entreat you, for I know your everlasting interests are in imminent jeopardy. God grant that you may not linger longer, lest haply you linger too long, and perish in your lingering! “The time is short.”

In a little while there will be a great concourse of people in the streets. I think I hear someone inquiring, “What are all these people waiting for?” “Do you not know? He is to be buried today.” “And who is that?” “It is Spurgeon.” “What! the man that preached at the Tabernacle?” “Yes, he is to be buried today.” That will happen very soon, and when you see my coffin carried to the silent grave, I should like every one of you, whether converted or not, to be constrained to say, “He did earnestly urge us, in plain and simple language, not to put off the consideration of eternal things. He did entreat us to look to Christ. Now he is gone, our blood is not at his door if we perish.”

God grant that you may not have to bear the bitter reproach of your own conscience! But as I feel that “the time is short,” I will stir you up so long as I am in this Tabernacle, and I do pray the Lord to bless the word every time I preach it from this platform. Oh, that some souls may be saved, that Jesus Christ may be glorified, Satan defeated, and heaven filled with saved ones!

*“’Tis not for man to trifle! Life is brief;
And sin is here.
Our age is but the falling of a leaf,
A dropping tear.
We have no time to sport away the hours;
All must be earnest in a world like ours.

Not many lives, but only one, have we,—
Frail, fleeting man:
How sacred should that one life ever be,—
That narrow span!
Day after day filled up with blessed toil,
Hour after hour still bringing in new spoil.”*

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.